

School district dominates K-PREP test

BY TRACY HARRIS

STAFF WRITER, THE OLDHAM ERA

Oldham County Schools is the highest-ranked county district in the state, according to accountability measures released Friday.

The district is ranked in the top 4 percent of public school districts across the state under the new "Unbridled Learning" model, part of the biggest change to Kentucky education in more than two decades.

Oldham County is ranked seventh-highest overall, with six independent districts ranked higher — including Anchorage Independent, which scored highest.

Seven of the district's 17 schools received Schools of Distinction honors, awarded to the top 5 percent of schools at each education level.

Superintendent Will Wells said he's pleased with the results.

"All of our schools are distinguished in some areas and need improvement in others," he said. "We're about continuous district improvement. We want to continue to grow."

Getting a lasso around Unbridled Learning

Unbridled Learning is part of 2009's Senate Bill 1, the most sweeping education reforms since the Kentucky Education Reform Act in 1990.

The new system takes into account scores for achievement, gap, growth, college and career readiness and graduation rate.

Elementary schools are scored only on achievement, gap and growth.

Middle schools have those three plus college and career readiness. High schools are scored on all five.

Achievement is based on student

performance on tests in reading, math, science, social studies and writing.

Gap compares students who are members of traditionally underperforming groups — ethnic minorities, special education, poverty and limited English proficiency — to overall performance.

Growth compares an individual student's score to the student's peers to determine if typical or higher levels of growth have occurred.

College and career readiness tracks students who have reached a certain level on a number of exams related to those areas.

Graduation rate is the percentage of on-time graduates.

The categories are weighted differently for each education level.

A big change from the previous CATS testing model is a lower highest

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Scores

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score — scores are now based on a 100-point scale, not the previous 140-point scale.

While "distinguished" and "proficient" labels remain, the cutoffs for those are much higher than before.

The distinguished label is applied to the top 10 percent of scores. Those in the next 20 percent are labeled proficient.

That leaves the remaining 70 percent to be labeled as "needing improvement."

However, this year's percentiles are being used to determine standard scores for future years, according to information released by the Kentucky Department of Education Friday.

Starting with 2012-13, scores will be compared to standard scores for elementary, middle and high schools.

District performance

Oldham County is the state's eighth-largest district, so to be ranked in the top 10 is an honor, officials say.

All three education levels scored above state averages in all areas.

However, gap scores for elementary and middle schools in Oldham County are near the state averages.

Gap scores compare the test results for African-American, Hispanic, Native American, special education, low income and limited English proficiency students — all combined into one gap group — to results for other students not in those categories.

The state average gap score is 12.2, out of 30 points. The district averaged 12.7 across its 10 elementaries.

For middle schools, the state average was 10.6 out of 28. Oldham County schools averaged 11.0.

Despite scoring above state averages, officials are optimistic college and career readiness scores will improve in upcoming years. It is possible Advanced Placement scores will be used in future college-readiness calculations — an area in which Oldham County ranks amongst the nation's highest.

District officials are also considering changes to career-readiness assessment offerings.

Statewide, college and career readi-

ness is up almost 9 percent — about 47 percent of students are considered college and career ready.

The district ranks only 41st in terms of graduation rates; however, the calculation used changed this year and will change again next year.

District Assessment Coordinator Leslie Robertson has called the current calculation "not honest" because it is based on the assumption that a district's population remains steady over time. And, the rate doesn't include students who have an individualized plan in place that allows them longer than four years to graduate.

School performance

Of the district's 10 elementaries, three scored distinguished, two proficient and five needing improvement.

Goshen Elementary and Harmony

continued

The Oldham Era Continued

La Grange Nov. 8, 2012

Elementary were both named Schools of Distinction, the highest honor. That level was given to 40 elementaries across the state representing the top 5 percent.

Buckner Elementary also received a distinguished label and was in the top 10 percent.

Camden Station and Locust Grove are labeled as proficient.

The remaining five elementaries, Kenwood Station, Crestwood, Centerfield, Liberty and La Grange, are labeled as needing improvement.

Middle school scores are based on the same categories as elementary schools with the addition of career and college readiness.

Three of the four Oldham middle schools scored in the top 10 percent — South, East and North.

However, Oldham County Middle was labeled as needing improvement.

All three high schools scored in the top 5 percent of state high schools.

High school scores take into account all five categories and weigh them equally.

North was ranked the state's eighth-best public high school, with South and Oldham County close behind in 10th and 11th, respectively.

South Oldham

High is considered a focus school — the district's only — because of a gap between on-demand writing scores from special education students compared to the rest of the school.

Robertson said the school is already looking at individual student data and targeting ways to improve.

And, she said, staff are reviewing individual scores for red flags that could indicate a scoring error.

Unbridled Learning's impact

Wells said K-PREP supplies more data than the old testing model and that the district will use that data to identify areas to improve.

"The state has raised the bar," he said. "We've embraced that."

In fact, the new accountability system is good for Oldham County, he believes.

"The new, rigorous standards are not just based on kids in Kentucky — they're national standards," he said.

Wells says Unbridled Learning will be a good indicator of student progress.

"If they do well on these standards, we know they'll be ready for prestigious colleges, high-demand jobs and becoming innovators and entrepreneurs," he said.

What's next

Anita Davis, the district's chief academic officer, said the results came much later than officials hoped.

The state had said scores would be released more than a month ago — instead, district officials couldn't talk publicly about the results until 51 days into the school year.

"It's a shorter period of time to put changes into effect," Davis said.

Davis reminded parents in attendance to not be surprised by lower test scores when students receive their reports — the standards for achieving proficient or distinguished status are much higher now, she said.

Individual student scores will be sent to parents in upcoming weeks.

From there, principals will help explain what the scores mean at the student, school and district levels.

Parents had their first opportunity to discuss the data with district officials and school board members at a meeting Monday night.

And, officials encouraged parents to contact school or district administrators with questions.

"We all need to support each other in trying to understand this," Davis said.

Email us about this story at:
tharris@oldhamera.com.

Daily Independent (Ashland, KY), Nov. 8, 2012

Hager celebrates success in testing

Mark Maynard, The Independent

ASHLAND — On Tuesday, Hager Elementary was the site of several voting precincts in Boyd County.

A day later, there was even more commotion in the gym.

Hager celebrated its recent honor as a "School of Distinction" as a result of students' performance during the most recent K-PREP tests.

The Wulfe Bros. Band, a high-energy, kid-friendly educational group, performed with the student body and faculty in full party mode.

"We wanted to make it memorable, make it last," said Phillip Caudill, Hager principal. "This award is a combination of several things, including students' effort and teachers' hard work."

Hager ranks as the 10th-highest performing school of 733 elementary schools in the state. The school is in the 99th percentile, with the distinction going to those in the top 95 percentile, Caudill said.

The honor was made known Friday, but the staff knew of the recognition a few days before. That's when officials decided to do something special, which is why the Wulfe Bros. were invited to perform a high-energy act focused on audience participation. The group, which is from Louisville, performs at many school-based functions.

Teachers and students seemed to enjoy themselves in the packed gymnasium with several fun-friendly songs.

The data graded was from the 2011-12 school year and included third through sixth grade. Those sixth-graders are now seventh-graders at Verity Middle School. "But they should share in this honor, too," Caudill said. "We wanted to include all the kids (in the celebration) to make sure they knew how special this was."

Caudill also said the Ashland Independent School District's support in the Response to Intervention training was important. The district funded the program that targets children who are not getting certain skills. Hager focused on math and reading, he said.

Paul Wulfe, one of the three brothers who performed, said Hager was one of the most impressive schools they had seen. They take their act to Kentucky, Indiana and Ohio.

"As much as they've done, this is a very big deal," he said. "I'm not sure we've ever been at a 'School of Distinction.' I'm real impressed with everybody here. Ashland should be very proud."

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Daily Independent (Ashland, KY), Nov. 7, 2012

School boards will see some changes

Mike James, The Independent

ASHLAND — Some school board seats will change hands as a result of Tuesday's election.

In the Boyd County district, Judy Nichols, a former administrator, defeated Daniel E. Phillips 907 votes to 572 to take the seat of Theresa Jackson. Jackson did not run for re-election.

Incumbent Randy Stapleton handily won re-election over Roxane Gross, 819 votes to 480.

In Fairview, Rick Tackett and Scott McIntyre, both incumbents, retained their seats. They received 752 and 701 votes respectively. Doug Campbell left trailing with 579 votes.

Russell Independent district incumbents Jane Ehrie and Terry Vest retained their seats with 3,171 votes and 2,904 votes respectively. Challenger Jim Craft fell short with 2,179 votes.

In Lawrence County, James M. See defeated James A. Cassady 687 to 658; D. Heath Preston defeated Jerry Robinson 409 to 282; and Barbara Lee Robinson won over James A. "Jim" Shannon 590 to 503.

Carter County incumbent Chris Patrick defeated Jeremy Rodgers 483 to 407 while Kaila Rogers Bender and David L. Jessie ran unopposed.

Two races in Elliott County were opposed: Nancy White beat incumbent Donnie Barker 192 to 135 and Brenda Fannin Sheets, the incumbent, beat Mary Adkins 186 to 143.

Unopposed races include Ashland Independent, where Carol Jackson, Frank DeMartino and Charles E. Chatfield will return for another term, Greenup County, where Kelly Adkins, Sue Miller and Linda Wellman keep their seats, and Raceland-Worthington, where incumbents Mike Boyles and Jerry Epling have no opponents. All vote totals are unofficial and were provided by the Greenup County clerk's office.

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Lincoln schools closer to making the grade

By STEPHANIE MOJICA
Danville Advocate Messenger
November 8, 2012
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STANFORD — Lincoln County schools, especially the high school, are making great strides toward getting educational quality more in line with state guidelines, local educators say.

The recently released Kentucky Performance Rating for Educational Progress (K-PREP) test results show Lincoln County schools are now ranked just above the state average, said Superintendent Karen Hatter. Two schools, Hustonville and McKinney elementaries, were ranked proficient according to the new state standards. The overall district score is 55.9; the state average is 55.2.

"While we are nowhere near where we want to be, performing at or above state average places us in a position to refine the curriculum and instructional processes we currently have in place," Hatter said. "Our goal is nothing less than to demonstrate

continuous academic improvement from year to year until we become a proficient district."

K-PREP is a new scoring system that cannot be fairly compared to the past Commonwealth Accountability Testing System (CATS) model, notes Pamela Hart, chief deputy of quality management. However, the school system's overall ranking is much better than in previous years.

Last year, the Kentucky Department of Education ranked Lincoln public schools as persistently low-achieving. This required a restructuring of Lincoln's administration and for Hatter and Lincoln High Principal Tim Godbey to work closely with the state to remediate education at the high school.

Lincoln High was ranked 57.6 overall in the K-PREP results which is above the state average and right at the "cusp of proficiency," Hatter said.

Hatter, Hart and Jim Ward, the district's coordinator for assessment, instruction and curriculum lauded Godbey's considerable efforts to help get every high school student "college or career ready."

"... To move from a priority school to
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one close to the proficient mark is a tremendous accomplishment," the superintendent said. "I commend the leadership of Mr. Godbey and the commitment of his entire staff."

Godbey has been meeting individually with students and teachers to help them with goal-setting and has "some really authentic approaches in place that are making a significant difference" in education, Hart said.

Even with two schools at proficiency and one school close to proficiency, local educators recognize there is still a lot of work to be done to get the school district into its best shape for the students.

Improvements are especially necessary at Crab Orchard Elementary which received the lowest score of 47. Stanford Elementary received the second-lowest score of 50.4.

District administrators and educators at the schools are in the first stages of creating intervention plans to get those scores closer to proficiency, Ward said.

"Although the district and most of our schools are not quite performing at this top echelon, we intend to move quickly toward that goal," Hatter said.

The next round of K-PREP tests, which cover reading, mathematics, science, social studies and writing, will be administered during the last two weeks of the 2012-13 academic year.

END

The value of the unquantifiable

By Jonathan Kleppinger

The Jessamine Journal Nov. 8, 2012

I get a chuckle every time I hear someone try to "define intangibles." The oxymoronic phrase is usually the work of sports broadcasters attempting to explain how a player impacts the game in ways not recorded in the box score. But people still pursue the unachievable goal of quantifying the unquantifiable in other arenas of life, especially in a statistics-driven world.

Kentucky's new assessment and accountability system for schools, Unbridled Learning, provides a wealth of data about student performance and lets citizens drill down from state-level data to the district level, the school level and even the grade level. And while this information can be extremely valuable in letting schools know where they stand and how they might need to improve, it is not the be-all, end-all measure of school quality.

School officials statewide and even here have been wringing their hands over the Unbridled Learning results for months, knowing some of the new numbers would look worse than those of the previous No Child Left Behind system and worrying parents might take up pitchforks.

Some of it doesn't look good. The Jessamine County district's overall score puts it in the 56th percentile, above the state average but with a score that comes in 77th out of 175 districts. That one big number of 56 - the percentile rank but also coincidentally the overall score - is made up of a lot of smaller numbers you can find in the Unbridled Learning data. Yet it does not - and by definition cannot - include the intangibles.

My job puts me inside the schools. Already this year, I've visited a program to get Warner Elementary dads involved in their children's school; I've watched Wilmore Elementary lead the way in environmental efforts; I've seen a principal from Argentina visit and learn about education here; I've seen a Nicholasville Elementary music teacher rewarded for diligent work to teach theory and character; I've visited an archery practice for an alternative-school team that consistently places among the top 12 in the world. I've watched a superintendent recognized multiple times as one of the best in the state restructure her administration after one of her two right-hand men moved up to a large superintendency and the other retired after a 48-year career in the system.

What do all these things have in common? Not one of them factors into the big fat 56 that Jessamine County is judged by each time someone looks at the Unbridled Learning data. Yet each one of them is part of what makes the Jessamine County school district what it is today.

I'm sure every student, teacher, administrator, parent and community member has their own set of personal experiences with the district - and some of those experiences have undoubtedly not been as positive. But as much as the district is made up of the academic factors that go into one big overall score for Jessamine County, it's made up of each person's individual experience.

So take the state-assessment information available to you - all of it. Don't let one number tell you everything you need to know about your school district or your school. Dig into it; research it; digest it. Learn about the results from your school, your district, your state. And even then, remember that despite the best efforts of education officials and sportscasters, you can't define the intangibles.

District 'needs improvement'

New test gives schools guide to better prepare students for college and careers

By MAGEN MCCRAREY
Staff writer

Students in the Laurel County School District "need improvement" in math and reading. The latest results from Kentucky's Unbridled Learning report card are in. The district aimed high but has some room to grow.

"Needs improvement is not an F," Superintendent Doug Bennett said. With the new testing model, he said, "the standards have been raised. There's increased rigor and as a result of that, every year it's based on a percentile."

Kentucky is the first state to adopt standardized testing in math and reading, and the first to assess them. The district ranked 54th in the Commonwealth and overall, earned a score of 55.8 out of 100 points. The statewide average was 55.2, which places Laurel County among the 121 out of 174 districts that fall in the "needs improvement" category.

"As far as where we landed in the state, we're about in the middle," Bennett said.

The new K-PREP testing model is not comparable to the previous KCCT test, as K-PREP scores out of 100 and KCCT out of 140. The new test focuses on preparing college and career ready students. It measures individual school and district achievement in math, science, social studies and writing; a performance gap from traditionally underperforming groups; typical or higher level student growth; middle and high

districts focus on college and career readiness," Kentucky Education Commissioner Terry Holliday stated in a press release last week. "The overriding goal of the state's public education system is to prepare students for the paths they want to take after high school, and this data shows that we are making progress toward that goal."

According to the results, there are more than 230 college and career ready students in Laurel County high schools. South Laurel carries the highest number of college and career ready students, while North Laurel High has more graduates. The graduation rate for the district stands at 67.8 percent.

"We are not satisfied where we are," said Tharon Hurley, director of Assessment and Accountability in the district. "We will target areas for improvement, such as getting our graduation rate up and eliminating dropouts. This will result in increasing our overall college/career readiness percentage in the future."

Bush Elementary is the only school who received a distinguished rating for their achievement, gap and growth. Campground, Cold Hill, Hunter Hills and Sublimity elementary schools received a proficient rating. Keavy Elementary showed the least amount of growth in reading and mathematics, while Cold Hill Elementary showed the most.

"Although more than two-thirds of schools and districts are in the 'Needs Improvement' category, this is not an indicator of failure. The Unbridled Learning model is one of continuous improvement, and schools and districts now have a wealth of data to use as they plan for improvement in student learning and achievement," Holliday said.

"We are taking steps to improve at school and district levels based upon our and state assessments. However, the school level assessments (MAPS, common assessments) serves as quality control that helps to guide and pace out instructional planning. We are placing increased emphasis on the analysis process to help focus instruction," Bennett added.

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TEST

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school college/career readiness; and average freshman graduation rates. Each category is worth 20 percent of the overall score for high schools.

The state Department of Education reported that more than 47 percent of students in Kentucky's public high school are prepared for college and/or careers — up nine points from last year, despite the increased academic rigor on the new test.

"This increase, which translates to more than 4,500 students, is a direct result of Kentucky's schools and

Central's state test scores soar

Principal: Teachers, students 'changed the atmosphere'

BY ERIN SCHMITT
MESSENGER STAFF WRITER
ESCHMITT@THE-MESSENGER.COM

MORTONS GAP — Hard work and dedication has paid off for Hopkins County Central High School.

In just a year's time, Central rose from the bottom five percent in the state to the 62nd

percentile on its state testing exams. Central's scores are among the highest in the region for high schools and the best for the grade levels in Hopkins County.

Central Principal Tommy Burrough praised his teachers and students, saying they took on the challenge to improve and

not only did that, but positively transformed the school's environment.

"They've changed the atmosphere," he said. "It's fun walking the halls, seeing the smiles again."

Up until the last year, calculus teacher Beth Hancock said students hadn't taken ownership of

the school. Apathy has turned into an eagerness to learn, with kids taking their coursework more seriously.

"They've worked hard," Hancock said. "I've never seen kids work so hard to achieve that."

In the past, ACT review packets might have been tossed aside, acting like it was just any other test, she said. However, this past year the students buck-

led down and studied diligently.

"It proves what kids can do when they get excited and buy into it," said Vickie Fox, an honors and AP chemistry teacher. "They wanted to do it. I think that was the biggest obstacle, not that they didn't have the ability, they just hadn't bought into it."

The seniors were the great driving force, she said.

Ashamed of last year's lackluster scores and fed up with negativity, the current senior class took it upon themselves to fix the problem.

"We didn't like the way Central had been represented in the past and we wanted to put our best foot forward," said Nathan Gaddis.

The senior was part of a focus group that banded together and drafted a list of goals and incentives for Central students. The group also encouraged other students to strive for higher testing scores, so it would reflect better on the high school.

"I think there was a spark in us throughout the senior class and the school," said senior Donovan Gary. "The way the seniors are right now, I'm just so motivated."

Burrough said he was proud of his seniors.

"You couldn't ask for a better senior class to change the school," he

said, adding they not only met the goals set, they blew them out of the water.

The seniors' efforts have had a trickle-down effect on the younger students.

The junior class is fired up to meet and surpass the benchmark set by the senior class, Hancock said. The sophomores don't want to disappoint either on the PLAN, and she said she's had 10th grade students asking everyday if the results were back.

The students have inspired the teachers.

"When the students are more motivated, you get more motivated," said Fox. "So, it's an exciting time."

The science department faculty stressed prepping for the ACT, said Fox. Each Wednesday, her class was in the computer lab going over online content to practice.

Central's ACT composite score jumped from 17.3 to 18.8 in one year.

"You don't see a 1.5 point jump hardly ever," Burrough said. "It's the highest score I think we've had in our school since the whole junior class has been tested as a state test."

Business teacher Laura Latham agreed that everyone — students, teachers

and administrators — have stepped up their game.

Central's motto is to "Dream big, work hard, achieve success."

"Sometimes you feel like you're working, working, working and you don't see the result," Latham said, "and when we did, it was exciting."

Students who met career and college readiness benchmarks will receive cords for graduation, Burrough said. The school also is planning a celebration ceremony for students.

Even students who didn't initially meet benchmarks, are still striving to do so. Interventions have been put in place, so some students have even elected to stay after school to study to retake the COMPASS or sit for an intervention test called the Kentucky Online Test (KYOTE), the principal said.

"We're giving them a whole lot of opportunities and the kids are taking them," he said.

Instead of looking at groups of students or an entire class to improve scores, efforts have been more honed in on individuals.

"We're looking at every-

CONTINUED

single kid and what they've got to do," said Latham. "Every scenario is different."

Starting in late November, Central plans to assign about 13 kids to teachers and faculty to help make sure each meets or succeeds benchmark, Burrough said.

The principal said he believes the school can build on what it has achieved this year and reach proficiency.

Central scored 56.6 points out of 100 in 2012. The school needs to raise its scores to 58.4 to be proficient.

Due to previous test results, Central had been named a persistently-low achieving school. It was renamed a priority school because the state's accountability model changed last year.

Priority schools must score proficient two consecutive years to lose the label.

Burrough thinks the school is up to the task.

"We are working harder than we ever had," he said. "... The classes are very rigorous compared to what they were. They are getting an education that everyone would like."

11/11/12

Putting schools to the test

MUCH TO LIKE IN NEW SYSTEM, BUT SHORTCOMINGS MUST BE ADDRESSED

We hope Kentucky educators can mine loads of useful data from the new school assessments because the average parent or taxpayer who tries to drill down into the statistical murk will come away frustrated.

Also, Education Commissioner Terry Holliday and the state school board must quickly address two big concerns:

- How can the new system drive schools to improve when their annual goals are set so low?
- Why, when Kentucky graduates must compete globally, are we basing school performance standards not on the best schools in the world but the highest-scoring schools in Kentucky?

Before explaining our concerns, we must applaud the many good changes Kentucky has made since 2009. As the first state to adopt national standards in reading and math, Kentucky is already giving students richer, deeper, more rigorous content in the classroom.

Where the wheels start falling off is the new plan for grading schools. Again there's much to like, such as finally more accurately measuring dropout rates.

What's questionable is whether the new system will drive school improvement fast enough, especially in schools where only a few students are proficient in reading and math.

Even the lowest-performing schools, those scoring in the 20s on a 100-point scale, must improve by just 1 point by next year.

That's a snail's pace, especially if your child is stuck in an under-performing school.

As far as we can tell — and we admit, we're flummoxed by much of K-PREP — the pace of required improvement will pick up only a very little in the future, consigning too many kids to bad schools for too long.

Also, for schools that fall short, there are no consequences and state assistance for only a few.

In fairness, Holliday and the Department of Education had to develop a new accountability system on the cheap because the legislature threw out the old without providing any money to build the new. The state outsourced creation of the test that students take to Pearson, a multinational, for-profit company.

The process seemed to break down when it came to grading school performance. A decision was made to grade schools, not on any agreed upon criteria, but based on the scores of the top 30 percent in Kentucky.

School-level accountability was one of the things taxpayers got in 1990 in return for a penny sales tax increase to pay for education reform and equalize funding for poor districts.

You can't expect the public to pay more to expand early childhood education and make other improvements, as Kentucky must to compete, without also measuring and publishing the results of that spending in a way that people can understand and trust.

Kentucky's new system is still very much a work in progress, which leads to our final question for Holliday, the state school board and lawmakers: Will a state that pioneered education accountability settle for a system that is so confusing, user-hostile and lax as to render it irrelevant? Please, say no.

Local test scores among highest in state

West Point Independent, LaRue County Schools in top 20

By Marty Finley

The first year of rankings for the Unbridled Learning accountability model, the newest form of statewide school assessment, places three local school districts in the top 25 out of 174 districts tested.

West Point Independent School was tied with Meade County at the 16th spot with a composite score of 63.5 while LaRue County Schools finished 20th at 63.1. Elizabethtown Independent Schools was ranked 23rd with an overall score of 61.8.

Schools and districts receive one overall score, on a scale of 1 to 100, that is created using the data from five areas — achievement in various subject areas, student growth in reading and math, college and career readiness among high school students, graduation rates and the proficiency of at-risk student populations. Schools and districts also receive specific data in each of the five categories.

The tests are based on the more rigorous Kentucky Core Academic Standards in English and math, which have been in place for a little more than a year.

West Point was the highest-ranked district in Hardin County in what turned out to be a transformative year. Garnering some of the lowest scores in the state in certain areas last year, the school district turned around its fortunes with a "distinguished" mark this year.

Schools in the top 30 percent of scores are labeled "proficient" while the other 70 percent are labeled "needs improvement." The top 10 percent of schools earned a "distinguished" mark. This is recalculated every year based on how the scores fall.

Hardin County Schools was tied with Bourbon County and Mayfield Independent in the 59th spot with a score of 57.8. HCS spokesman John Wright said the district is not dissuaded by the rankings because 70 percent of districts in the state are labeled as "needs improvement."

Wright pointed out HCS was only six-tenths of a point from a proficient ranking and is focusing more on growth than labels. Wright said there is a possibility the district's score could improve by several points next year but still fall below the proficient ranking depending on performances of other schools.

"We still don't like the label of 'needs improvement,' but we saw growth, so that's good," Wright said.

West Point Superintendent Pam Stephens said the district has created a reading program and improved the district's comprehension for social studies, a subject in which it scored last during the previous year.

Principal Lee Ann Mik said new guides have been incorporated within the district to coincide with the new standards. Mik also meets with each teacher once a week and sends staff members to observe teachers in other districts to help ensure best practices are followed. The district hopes to be among the top five in the state by 2016.

"We never let down our guard," Mik said. "We always challenge our students and we put a lot of faith in them. They're all very talented individuals."

Stephens said West Point was challenged to change the culture and is working to peel back a stigma placed on the small district.

"That's the (scores) we hope we can keep up in the district for years to come," Stephens said.

LaRue County Schools saw a large gain this year, too, jumping from the 41st position last year. Superintendent Sam Sanders said the district has seen sweeping improvements in the past 10 years, when LaRue was ranked 131st in the state.

Sanders said the district has installed new programs, but success was attained through the resources of human beings.

"We've put our emphasis on people," he said.

Sanders said the district has hired the best administrators and teachers it can find and successfully retained them as employees because of a competitive salary schedule that ranks among the best in the state.

"Our goal for a long time was to make top 10 percent, which is distinguished," he said. "We only missed that by three tenths of a point."

Gary French, superintendent of Elizabethtown Independent Schools, said the district finished in the 87th percentile, falling just a few percentage points short of a distinguished ranking.

The district fared well in the achievement and growth categories, French said, but it recognizes the need for improvement in the category of achievement gap. French said he hopes the scores are reflective of the district's desire never to deviate from its mission of reaching each child every day.

"If we do that on a daily basis, then these test scores take care of themselves," he said.

The Kentucky Standard

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State says four schools need special improvement

By Jennifer Corbett

Tuesday, November 13, 2012 at 5:45 pm

This is the second in a series on area schools' scores under state assessment measures known as KPREP.

The state has identified four area schools that need improvement in teaching students with disabilities.

Two Bardstown and two Nelson County schools have been labeled "focus schools" under KPREP, the state's new accountability system.

Bardstown Middle School, Bardstown High School, Bloomfield Middle School and Nelson County High School all scored under the state average in certain subject areas, which labeled each as a "focus school" under KPREP.

KPREP (Kentucky Performance Rating for Education Progress), which replaced the Kentucky Core Content Test that was under the CATS system used in previous years, grades schools on five sections: achievement, growth, gap, college/career readiness and graduation rate.

Once the grade is set, they're compared to other schools throughout Kentucky.

The areas in which the schools need to work on are their "focus area."

Bardstown Middle School scored under state average in reading for students with disabilities, while Bardstown High School scored under the state average for writing for students with disabilities.

The same is true for Nelson County schools. Bloomfield Middle School scored below the state average in reading for special education students.

NCHS's focus areas were reading, writing and language mechanics for special needs students.

Both districts said they're working on ways to improve those scores for next year.

Anthony Orr, superintendent of Nelson County Schools, said the district is working to improve its scores by focusing on instructional planning, to make sure there is an alignment between teaching and student work.

What this means is that Nelson County is making sure students' homework is based off what they're learning in the classroom.

"What we will look at is simply making ourselves aware of the needs that some kids have," Orr said.

For example, teachers will teach a subject three different ways.

For instance, if a student is having difficulty understanding a math problem, the teacher may discuss it in a lecture, do a hands-on activity or have students draw a picture to help them conceptualize the problem.

We'll "teach them how to do it this way," Orr said. "Then, I'm going to teach them how to do it a second way. Then we're going to practice it a third way. Then every kid gets the benefit of working that problem and find out what works for them."

Brent Holsclaw, superintendent of the Bardstown Independent Board of Education, said he knows the elementary and middle school has the tools to improve its KPREP score next year.

"I know the teachers and staff are working hard," he said, noting that the district utilizes the MAP assessment, which is taken by high school sophomores, the EXPLORE, which is taken by eighth-graders, and the ACT, which is taken by high school juniors, to monitor student progress.

"Our goal as a school system has always been to prepare students for the future," he said.

Chris Pickett, Bardstown High School principal, said the school continued with mastery learning style, formative and summative assessments and adjusting instruction to make sure students are not left behind.

They also plan to utilize professional learning communities.

"We're well aware of students who fall into each category," he said. He said they are "making sure we recognize our students as individuals."

Pickett added that the school is breaking down the KPREP data to "identify specifically what will take students to the next level."

Even though BHS was labeled a "focus school" in the first year of KPREP, Pickett said he was pleased with the school's score.

"We're two points from being proficient," he said. "We know we put in the hard work. (While we aren't proficient this year,) I know we're knocking on the door and we're motivated in meeting that next goal in proficiency and we're not stopping there."

JENNIFER CORBETT can be contacted at jcorbett@kystandard.com

South Oldham High has impressive test scores and a drive to fix issues

4:12 PM, Nov 13, 2012

Written by

Emily Hagedorn

The Courier-Journal

South Oldham High School is like someone who is healthy — a marathon runner, even — with a blood pressure problem.

That's how Anita Davis, Oldham County Schools' chief academic officer, views South Oldham's results in the new state assessments, which were released earlier this month.

The state is expected to release individual student test scores to schools and parents within the next several days.

Overall, the district received a score of 66.3, rating it "distinguished" and putting it in the top 4 percent of districts in the state.

And South Oldham High School was among nine of Oldham's 17 schools to also be rated "distinguished," beating out 96 percent of schools statewide.

But next to South Oldham's score, rank and classification are two words: focus school. And it is the only school in the district to be deemed as such.

"I did not know that you could be both" distinguished and a focus school, Principal Dorenda Neihof said.

Focus schools are a new addition to Kentucky educators' vocabularies, born out of the recent sweeping statewide education overhaul that has come under the name Unbridled Learning and that has also produced new student assessments.

A school is designated a focus school if graduation rates fall below 60 percent for two consecutive years or if the school has low test scores among typically underachieving populations, which include low-income, minority, disabled or limited-English students.

In South Oldham's case, its writing scores among students with disabilities were low enough for them to be in the category.

"People have to keep this in perspective," Davis said, going back to her analogy of a healthy person with high blood pressure.

Neihof and other officials were quick to point out that they are focusing efforts on fixing this problem, along with issues highlighted at other schools.

And this shouldn't overshadow the great work South Oldham has done and some of its more stellar programs, Neihof said, adding, "You have to just do the best for the kids that you know how to do."

Areas for growth

South Oldham received a score of 68.9, which is almost 14 points higher than the state average.

Going into this score is the fact that an average of 65 percent of South Oldham students scored proficient or distinguished in the test's seven subject areas, compared to an average of almost 43 percent of high schoolers statewide.

But South Oldham's results are just a piece of how Oldham County fared.

MORE

"We know that regardless of whether or not a school has a focus category attached with them, there will be areas that need to be addressed. ... so it's an opportunity to drill down," Davis said at a recent special school board meeting.

While Goshen Elementary School at Hillcrest ranked in the top 1 percent of schools, La Grange Elementary ranked below the state average, getting outranked by 57 percent of Kentucky schools.

La Grange was also among the six Oldham schools designated as needing improvement, which meant they were not in the top 30 percent.

Other schools in this category include Centerfield Elementary, Crestwood Elementary, Kenwood Elementary, Liberty Elementary and Oldham County Middle School.

Their problem areas included low percentages of students scoring proficient and distinguished in areas of the state exam.

But overall the district has the most ground to gain, in terms of putting more distance between it and the state averages, in its gap scores — the test scores among typically underachieving populations.

The new assessments rate schools and districts based on overall test scores, gap scores and academic growth among students, in addition to the college and career readiness among middle and high schoolers and high school graduation rates.

Davis said that the gap scores could possibly be improved through more professional development for teachers, more frequent student assessments and student intervention methods.

South Oldham High School teachers were going to discuss their gap scores and focus area, in particular, during a recent early-release day.

And all districts and schools are mandated by the state to develop improvement plans.

"There's a lot of anxiety right now to take this ... and make some changes," Davis said. "But the worst thing we can do is put together a plan and not monitor it. We will be a system of continual improvement."

Areas to celebrate

Neihof definitely has an eye on the test scores but is also quick to point out other areas of the school that are excelling though aren't directly reflected in the recent assessments.

If South Oldham should be known for anything, it should be its 16 Advanced Placement classes and seven classes that offer dual college credit, she said.

Five years ago, 549 students took AP exams at the school compared to 897 last year.

All together, 1,092 students are enrolled in AP or dual credit classes this year, she said.

"It's a great transition because they have the safety net of high school but with more pressure than before," said Christine Price, who has a doctorate in education and teaches an English dual credit course.

This was echoed by some of her students, who also said that the class teaches them lessons outside of the subject area that will be helpful, such as note taking and study habits.

"You have to do a lot of writing," said Kelsey Kidd, who is hoping to use the credit at Western Kentucky University. "I'm trying to get ahead."

The school's Link Crew is also a shining point, Neihof said. It's part of a nationwide high school transition program that pairs upperclassmen with freshmen.

MORE

South Oldham was the first Kentucky high school to have this, she said.

And through this, upperclassmen have intervened to help freshmen who were struggling academically, along with showing them around the school.

Standing in front of other upperclassmen in their Link Crew class, junior Hannah Wright and senior Makayla Fraim practiced the lesson they would soon use in a freshman class.

Designed to teach the freshmen to work together and take comfort in the fact that high school gets easier, Hannah and Makayla went over some puzzles and exercises they would use, sometimes repeating them to increase the chances that more students will do better.

"Did you guys notice that, since you were familiar with the process more, you got more right?" Makayla asked.

Perhaps this could also work for Oldham County Schools — and schools statewide — with test scores, some said. With time and more test cycles the system will become more understandable.

"It's difficult information," school board chairwoman Joyce Fletcher said. "It's major changes in the state of Kentucky in our curriculum and our assessment."

Editorial:

ISSUE: Unbridled Learning test scores

OUR VIEW: Progress is worth the spotlight

The first scores from Kentucky's new school assessment system released this month gave educators a good look at where students stand.

It's long awaited information. The model was overhauled, the student tests were tougher and while school districts were focused on the numeric scores, their status, so to speak, would depend on the performance of every other district in the state.

The top 30 percent of schools are determined proficient or distinguished, meaning the benchmark for proficiency will change every year. Schools essentially will be competing against each other to stay out of "needs improvement" status.

Great successes were found in the scores for area schools. West Point Independent School and Meade County Schools tied for 16th place among Kentucky's 174 school districts, putting them in the 91st percentile. LaRue County Schools ranked 20th. Elizabethtown Independent Schools ranked 23rd. Six Hardin County Schools were deemed proficient. Congratulations to those students and teachers.

All should strive for a spot at the top and celebrate their climb.

Yet, not long ago, state officials warned against rankings. In fact, rankings weren't released and you needed a spreadsheet program or a lot of extra time to figure out where schools ranked. The common analogy was that if two schools, one at the south end of the state and one at the north end, raced to Florida, success would depend on miles per hour, not who got there first.

It made sense then and it makes sense now. All of Kentucky is racing for proficiency and all gains — not just the gains that push a district into the top 30 percent, the top 10 percent — should build momentum.

Some school administrators have said they are not overly concerned with the label, from needs improvement to distinguished, but focused on individual scores and progress. That's important. It's up to districts and schools now to tear apart this data and use it to determine what's working in the classroom.

Parents, too, should take a closer look at the data. A lot of attention has gone to districtwide composite scores, but the scores break down to schools and subjects. Every district and every school has its own report card. All are available at <http://applications.education.ky.gov/SRC/>.

The information, along with schools' internal assessments such as Hardin County Schools' MAPS program, gives teachers knowledge to build improvement plans.

It also challenges us to think about how education will move forward and what priorities and attitudes need to shift.

The report cards also contain non-testing data that show, for example, 92 of the 110 students at West Point Independent School receive a free or reduced-price lunch. It seems obvious to ask what we can learn from West Point Independent School about closing achievement gaps for lower-income students.

Elsewhere, almost 95 percent of LaRue County Schools' computers meet minimum state standards, compared to about 72 percent statewide. How does that play into student performance and how can schools make it affordable?

So, now, let's start talking, planning. This was a baseline year and from here, we fortify and build.

Russell Middle celebrates honor

Mike James/The Independent

RUSSELL — Academic accolades are the norm in Russell schools, but that didn't diminish the elation Wednesday when Russell Middle School celebrated its latest honor.

Students, teachers and staff filled the gym with cheers and applause during an assembly to mark the school's new designation: Under the new Kentucky accountability testing system, Russell Middle is a distinguished school based on test scores being in the top 10 percent statewide. —

"This means you are the best. You have put the history of Russell and its legacy and tradition of excellence on the map," Superintendent Susan Compton told students.

Nearly 500 sixth-, seventh- and eighth-graders, most of them dressed in commemorative T-shirts, sent up a thundering cheer. The T-shirts, supplied by community donors, were screen-printed with the message, "We practiced, we tested, we conquered."

It was a party mood. Teachers showed their dance moves to the raucous appreciation of the students, and then stood back as students busted moves of their own.

In a school where the bar is already set high, Russell students moved it even farther, according to Principal Sean Horne. Horne offered a shout-out to last year's eighth-graders, who are now freshmen at Russell High, noting their stellar performance on the Explore test, a precursor to the ACT. That group's composite score was an impressive 16.9.

Newly released Explore scores for this year's eighth-graders show they did even better, with a composite score of 17, the highest Russell score since the school began administering the test, he said.

Teachers were as elated, perhaps more so, than the students. The recognition was validation for months of hard work in the face of a new and rigorous accountability system, English teacher Carol Digby said.

More than that, it inspires students, she hopes. "We try to instill in them the feeling of success and belonging to something bigger than themselves," she said.

Faculty, support staff and students did it as a team, she said. "This is a special building. It's like a family here. It's our second family."

Ultimately, the tests and the tributes are secondary to the primary reason for school, she said. "We don't work here every day for high K-Prep scores, but to teach kids to be productive members of society."

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Breaking News: Car collides with EMS during patient transport

Updated: 11:53 am

Some area schools lag behind state in education growth

Scores vary widely among individual schools in growth score of KPREP

By Jennifer Corbett

Saturday, November 17, 2012 at 12:02 pm

Students in area schools overall are making progress in their education when compared to schools around the state, although some lag behind the state average.

In Nelson County Schools, according to recently released statewide accountability tests, 65.5 percent of elementary students were considered as making improvement in either reading or math. Among middle schools, that dropped to 65 percent of students making progress. Statewide, 60.5 percent of elementary students showed growth and 60.4 percent of middle schoolers.

However, Nelson County High School was below the state average of 58.5 percent showing growth. The school scored 55.4 percent

All Bardstown schools scored below the state average. (See accompanying table).

Measures were broken down by individual schools, with widely varying scores.

The growth measured by the state was in math and reading.

Area school officials say the benchmark year for KPREP showed they are on the right path, but they still have room for improvement.

The Kentucky Performance Rating for Education Progress (KPREP) replaced the CATS system that was used in previous years.

Nelson County scored in the 45th percentile overall statewide, while Bardstown scored in the 29th. The percentiles show how the districts stacked up with others across the state.

With the number of schools and the bell-shaped curve on which they are ranked, just a few points in their overall scores can drastically affect where they fall in the percentile.

For instance, overall, Nelson County scored a 54.1 on KPREP, while Bardstown scored 51.6.

Growth is just one of several factors upon which the overall score is based. KPREP grades schools on five sections: achievement, growth, gap, college/career readiness and graduation rate. Once the grade is set, school districts are compared to other schools throughout Kentucky.

"This is a new beginning," said Brent Holsclaw, superintendent of the Bardstown Independent Board of Education.

Some parents may feel some "sticker shock" when they see the test scores, Anthony Orr, superintendent of Nelson County Schools, warned. The grading scale has changed from 0-140 to 0-100.

But Holsclaw said KPREP is "well worth a score lowering because the child is being challenged more and is more prepared for the future."

The goal of KPREP is to continually move students to a higher standard of learning, even if they're already considered proficient, according to Tim Beck, director of elementary schools for the Nelson County Board of Education.

According to Holsclaw, standards inside the classroom have been increased to ensure all students grow.

For example, what has been taught in the fifth grade is now being taught in the fourth grade.

"We're going to be ahead of the curve while others are struggling," Holsclaw said in comparing Kentucky to other states.

City board hears details of state assessment results

District ranked 13th in state

Nola Sizemore
Staff Writer

With a classification of distinguished, the Harlan Independent School System was ranked 13th in the state scoring in the 93 percentile as a highest performing district. The Harlan Middle School was also ranked in the 92 percentile as a highest performing school with a distinguished classification.

"If you look at how many schools and districts are distinguished there's not that many," said Supervisor of Instruction Dr. James Greene III during a presentation to the Harlan Independent Board of Education on Thursday. "Even though our test scores overall are lower than they have been in the past, our schools and district look pretty good at this point in this new system."

Five major components of the Unbridled Learning accountability model includes information about achievement, gap, growth, college/career readiness and graduation rate, which have been applied to test scores and other data for the first

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Results

From page 1

time for the 2011-2012 school year. Greene said he feels it's "really important" for everyone to understand the new classifications in Unbridled Learning and what they mean.

Superintendent David Johnson said the new testing system is based on new state academic standards, which have been deemed more rigorous and demanding by state and local education officials.

Receiving a proficient classification, Greene said the Harlan High School ranked in the 87 percentile.

"Specifically, high school English did really well in the reading, receiving a proficient/distinguished ranking," said Greene. "On-demand writing, both the 10th and 11th grades were 75 percent proficient/distinguished, which shows a

lot of continuity there. They had very low novice scores. We had really good science and social studies scores in the middle school from fifth and eighth grades, which scored in the 85 percentile with a proficient/distinguished classification. The seventh grade science scored in the 82 percentile with a proficient classification. In fourth grade science, eighth grade social studies and 10th grade writing there were no novice scores. There are some areas which show really bright spots."

Noting the Harlan Elementary School needs improvement, Greene said the school is only seven points from being proficient.

He said there are a lot of changes that resulted from these standards and now the district is "going to have to get everything realigned."

He also said new this year is a K-3 review, which will look at how primary education is operated.

Greene told board members the Stanford 10 National Reference scores were higher than in the past and some of their scores were in the 80 percentile — "scores the school had never had before." He said these scores show how the

Harlan Independent compares to the nation.

On average, the statewide school overall score was in the 55.2 percentile. For elementary schools, the average was 57.3 percentile, for middle schools 53.5 percentile and for high schools 54.8 percentile.

"We haven't lost ground, we've just moved to new ground," said Greene. "I think sometimes people hear all this and they think, well, they're not really doing well — but it's not that we're not really doing well, we've just moved into new territory and we're aiming for a different target now from where we were before. Our kids are doing good solid work. They're just being asked to do more challenging work than before."

In other action:

*Certified Public Accountant Troy Gaw presented his completed district financial audit for 2012. He said no problems were found.

*Board members approved four architects being interviewed, who submitted letters of interest, for the district upcoming construction project at the elementary and high schools.

*Awarded the bid for lumber and supplies for 2012-2013 to Southern Wholesale in Harlan.

Reach Nola Sizemore at 606-573-4510 or at nsizemore@heartlandpublications.com

Test for college, career prep

Over the last two decades, Kentucky has built a national reputation for its willingness to blaze new paths when it comes to education. Early this month, we took another major step forward with the release of the latest round of school accountability scores.

Normally, this information would only be of interest within our borders, but not this year. That's because Kentucky was the first state out of what are now more than 40 to adopt a rigorous set of standards for math and English/language arts, and we are in turn the first state to test our students under these new guidelines.

Our goal is to truly see where our students stand against their counterparts across the country and around the world. Rather than testing whether they have a good understanding of the material, we want to know if they are on the way to being ready for college and a career — the benchmark that counts most.

As state officials predicted, this change in testing caused a deep dip in scores. In 2010-11, for example, three-fourths of elementary school students were considered proficient or better in reading, but in the latest scores, that figure dropped by a third.

In high school, meanwhile, a little less than half of Kentucky's 43,000 graduating seniors last year were considered college- or career-ready, though that was an improvement over the previous school year.

Our average graduation rate has also ticked up slightly, but nearly one of four high school freshmen still doesn't graduate with his or her class. That's one reason why we in the Kentucky House have been pushing to increase our drop out age, something more than 30 other states have already done.

A few days after the school scores were released, a draft of another telling report was unveiled by the Office of Education Accountability (OEA). This legislative branch agency took an in-depth look at teacher shortages across the state and how they are being overcome.

Overall, it found that Kentucky follows the national average almost exactly when it comes to teacher attrition. About 15 percent leave their school annually, though nearly half of those are just moving to another school, either in their district or elsewhere in the state. Of the remainder, 2 percent retire, 1 percent becomes school administrators and 5 percent choose to leave the profession altogether, at least temporarily.

OEA found two seemingly opposite trends are taking place in Kentucky's

schools. While newer teachers are more likely to leave the classroom — about a third of teachers who began their careers in 2008 are no longer teaching — the percentage nearing retirement is down as well. A decade ago, nearly a fourth of all teachers had 20 or more years of experience, but now the total is less than a fifth.

Another positive trend is that emergency certificates have declined sharply since 2000 while the number of alternative teaching certificates has risen about as fast. Although many teachers go through the traditional route of majoring in education in college, Kentucky has eight other methods in which teachers can become certified.

That includes obtaining a degree with a major in the relevant subject they want to teach, which is the most popular of the eight, while others range from being a veteran, having exceptional work experience or being a college professor. Between 2008 and 2012, about a fifth of all new teachers got their job through one of these alternative routes.

As for those who major in education, OEA found that some subjects are proving to be more popular than others. Consider that there are nearly twice as many college students completing their degree in middle school math education than high school math education, and there appears to be a shortage of teachers when it comes to science classes in high school.

A highlight for this profession is that Kentucky is among the nation's leaders when counting the number of teachers certified by the prestigious National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. More than 2,100 have passed this rigorous test, which puts us 11th among the states. About two-thirds of our schools have at least one of these teachers, but the General Assembly's goal is for every school to have one by 2020.

Although this report is not yet online, it soon will be, along with the latest profiles for our public school districts, which make it much easier to compare such things as personnel, graduation rates, ACT scores and pupil/teacher ratios. Other interesting studies by OEA over the years can be found as well; if you would like to know more, its website is <http://www.lrc.ky.gov/oea/>. If you would like to see our local school report cards, they can be found at the Dept. of Education's website: <http://applications.education.ky.gov/SRC/>

These reports cover a lot of ground, but if you have any questions about them or any other issue affecting the state, I would like to know.

Time trials boost Bremen scores

More Muhlenberg schools to sample scrimmages

BY MEGAN HARRIS
MESSENGER-INQUIRER

When third-, fourth- and fifth-grade students at Bremen Elementary School took the the Kentucky Performance Rating for Educational Progress (K-PREP) exams in April, teachers panicked — privately.

"Our staff was stressed," said Principal Robby Davis. "Not only had they never seen this test before — so they didn't know what to expect — but we were supposed to switch buildings in just a few days. 'Get your whole room ready to move, but before you go, give this huge assessment.' They didn't know what to expect."

Of Muhlenberg County's eight schools, only Bremen was deemed proficient with a score of 63 on a 100-point scale, between 2 and 11

SEE BREMEN/PAGE A2

FROM THE FRONT PAGE

points higher than any other site. Though overall district scores landed students among the 46th percentile statewide, Bremen children ranked among the state's top 30 percent.

Matt Perkins, assistant superintendent of instruction at Muhlenberg County Schools, credited the Bremen's success to stamina and efficiency.

"They really took it upon themselves to put energy into test prep skills, like timing the kids on everyday activities throughout the year," he said, shortly after scores were released Nov. 2. "They did that more than any other school, but you better believe we're doing that across the district now."

Setting time limits, Perkins said, encourages urgency.

"We had kids in every school who couldn't complete their reading passages, let alone the full assessments," he said.

Similar to the ACT, K-PREP exams for grades three through eight use a blended model of national- and state-mandated test questions, including multiple-choice, extended-response and short answer items.

"The reading sections are much longer than those our kids have seen in class," Perkins said. "If you've never seen that kind of structure, it can be intimidating. Our diagnostic assessments show our kids are much further along content-wise than we saw on the state tests. So why weren't our scores reflective of that?"

At Bremen, Lori Dennis, curriculum specialist, said educators time students on pop quizzes, unit tests and end-of-course assessments. At least once a year, they hold practice assessments — dubbed scrimmages — with customized Common Core exams created by Bremen teachers in their free time.

"It's one thing to help them learn the content, but other variables can hinder their ability to communicate those skills," Dennis said. "We're confident that our kids learned the standards, and scrimmages give us a chance to practice while we still have time to improve. Our teachers check constantly, of course, but you want to make sure they're retaining the information as we go."

Teachers schoolwide were trained in test item development, including those writing tests in reading and math for grades K-2.

"This our chance to turn 'em lose and see what they can do on their own," she said. "After Thanksgiving break, we'll follow up with knee-to-knee conversations with every student. This is what you did great on. You're not so good here, how can I help? And we encourage teachers to look at big picture, too. They fill out blueprint data for me. What standard was this question designed to assess? What verbs are you using here? What cognitive skills are you testing there? If seven or eight students missed question No. 1, do we know why? We want our practice assessments to be totally congruent with Common Core."

This year was a first, she said, a complete unknown. When students completed the exams in April, still surrounded by sparse walls and cardboard boxes, Dennis said teachers "were worried to death."

"Now that we know the

standards, we know what to shoot for," she said. "Of course we have gaps, but we're working toward data-driven improvement and interventions through the year to help students achieve mastery as they go. How do you eat a bear? One bite at a time."

Students across Muhlenberg County will sit Monday for a streamlined version of Dennis' scrimmage exams. With the results, Perkins said educators will look for growth in comprehension and pacing.

"In April, we had kids who realized in that first test they wouldn't be able to finish, and it upset them," he said. "As the day progressed, we could see them get more and more down. We're adapting, improving, putting a laser-like focus on Common Core and not only how our teachers deliver that content, but how we prepare students for assessing the material."

Next year, Perkins said, every Muhlenberg County school will score at or above proficiency.

"It only gets better from here."

Megan Harris, 691-7302,
mharris@messenger-inquirer.com

GUEST COLUMN

Kentucky's new test leaves many questions unanswered

By Jim Waters, Contributing Writer
Danville Advocate Messenger
November 19, 2012 Page 1 of 2

Grand Canyon-esque gaps in math scores. Praise for poorly performing schools. Failed top-down policies.

So far, the developing story being told by the initial batch of results from Kentucky's new testing system suggests that our public education system's performance is — when compared to previous testing results — more of a déjà-vu-all-over-again narrative than a success in adequately preparing students for the future.

However, the jury is still out on how much, if any, improvement the new Kentucky Performance Rating for Educational Progress (K-PREP) will offer beyond previous testing systems in providing an accurate picture of, and steps to improve schools' performance.

Plenty of anxieties remain concerning:

Learning gaps

Statewide, K-PREP elementary and middle school reading proficiency rate gaps between white and black

students and whites and Hispanics are larger than in the previous testing system.

An even unhappier picture emerges when individual schools are graded.

Education analyst Richard Innes reports the new K-PREP math scores reveal enormous proficiency rate gaps of at least 30 points between whites and blacks in 21 out of 88 Jefferson County public elementary schools with adequate data.

The new numbers reveal that taxpayers, who will shell out \$8.4 billion during the current General Fund budget for public schools, were duped by previous rosy claims from CATS — K-PREP's predecessor — which inflated scores and lowered the bar even as the competition for good jobs grows more global and fiercer from better educated students in China and India.

That's the biggest gap of all — where our education system is, and where our students need to be when they search for employment.

That \$8.4 billion is a massive price tag for such large learning gaps.

Huge grading curves

Displeasure with our public school system should turn to outrage once the public learns that after going through all of the rigmarole of a new testing system, evidence surfaced that Kentucky's K-PREP seems to be playing an updated version of "calling evil good."

MORE

In this case, it's calling "failure distinguished."

For instance, two Jefferson County schools — Norton and Brandeis Elementary — had math proficiency rate gaps of more than 50 points between whites and blacks, yet each is being recognized as a "School of Distinction."

Officials claim these schools outperform 95 percent of all Kentucky elementary schools and will face no consequences for leaving their black students so far behind.

"No way do they deserve to duck consequences considering their performance related to minority students," Innes said.

Failing to protect vulnerable students

While the Bush administration's No Child Left Behind was yet another on the heap of failed big-government education programs, it did sift through the mire of scores to provide some accountability for the performance of minorities and students with learning disabilities — groups previously ignored.

However, Innes notes that the K-PREP results — released with little consideration for making them more understandable for the experts (much less parents) to decipher — lump minorities and students with learning

disabilities into one overall calculation.

As a result, groups once protected from being passed over by NCLB accountability again remain in danger of being left behind.

No charter schools

By approving Initiative 1240 on Election Day, Washington voters made theirs the 42nd state to approve charter schools. Kentucky should become No. 43, especially in light of the continuing learning gaps exposed by K-PREP and the fact that charter schools offer hope for those very students most likely to get left behind in traditional public schools.

On top of denying parents the option of choosing a public charter school for their children, now the commonwealth must also endure yet another testing system optimistically labeled "Unbridled Learning."

Jim Waters is acting president of the Bluegrass Institute, Kentucky's free-market think tank. Reach him at jwaters@freedomkentucky.com.

END

Bell principals tell school board about test scores

Middlesboro Daily News

By Anthony Cloud, Staff Writer

Nov. 20, 2012

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Principals from Bell County schools attended the Bell County Board of Education meeting on Monday to address the K-PREP scores recently received. Each principal commented on the good and the bad from the test results, as well as addressing how they plan to improve as time goes on.

There are several differences between the new K-PREP test and the KCCT exam of the past. K-PREP is based on a 100 point scale and is a comparison exam — comparing schools and students.

The exam also compares schools in areas such as achievement, growth, gap and college and career. All K-Prep scores are counted the same.

Bell County High School Principal Richard Gambrel said his school was above state average in English. According to Gambrel, reading scores for the boys were also above the state average.

Free and reduced students scored 10 points above the state average in English, he noted.

One main area for concern in English was the amount of novice students, which is on the lower end of the performance scale for the K-PREP test.

In the math department, 41 percent of the students scored in the novice range. The school has implemented a new math program — Math Transformation — and have started incorporating the ALEKS program with targeted group, which Gambrel said he expects to boost math scores.

In social studies, Gambrel said the focus is on essay style writing instead of open response questions. He said the school teaches using primary sources.

Areas for concerns in the area include a high novice percentage and a low distinguished percentage. At Bell High, 51 percent of the students scored novice while four percent of the students scored distinguished, the highest possible performance level. In social studies, Gambrel plans to put more emphasis on constructed response.

In science, free and reduced students scored better than the state average.

Gambrel said the school will continue grouping students by ability in science classes, focusing on moving toward formulating effective constructed responses. There are also plans to re-align freshmen science standards.

Overall, Gambrel said the areas for improvement include the academic areas of math, reading, science and College and Career Readiness.

Thirty minute classes have been scheduled within the school day to provide students the opportunity for extra help in areas of math, reading and ACT prep, according to Gambrel. Programs being used during that time include ALEKS, Reading Revisited, Accelerated math and various websites including NMSI and Study Island.

The school has also partnered with Advance Kentucky to make the curriculum more rigorous. They are also using ACT Quality Core across the curriculum, which is aligned with college and career standards.

Bell Central principal Greg Wilson had several celebration points for his school. According to Wilson, at the elementary level (third through fifth grade) the school had an accountability score of 64.9. That placed the school in the 78th percentile, which is categorized as a proficient school. **MORE**

At the elementary level, the school is ranked first in the district and first out of 27 schools in Bell, Knox and Harlan counties.

The school scored 100 — the maximum points possible — in science in the fourth grade and social studies in the fifth grade. The school also ranked first in the district and exceeded the state average in everything except language mechanics at the elementary level, according to Wilson.

The school was also above the district and state average in every elementary grade. They scored first in the district with the gap students and second in the district in the growth score at the elementary level.

In the middle grade level of sixth through eighth, Bell Central received an accountability score of 56.1, which place them in the 57th percentile and classified the school as a needs improvement school. Wilson stated the school was only 2.6 points from being classified as proficient.

The school ranked fourth in the district at this level and seventh out of 20 schools in Bell, Knox and Harlan counties, according to Wilson.

Wilson also said the middle grade level performed consistently in all four areas by ranking fourth in achievement, fourth in gap, fourth in growth and second in college and career readiness.

Though the school was fairly successful in the assessment, Wilson said there are still stated areas needing work. Language mechanics is one area. The school was below the state average at the elementary and middle level. Wilson plans to have daily language practice to assist the problem.

Wilson also wants to increase the percentage of distinguished students in math. Wilson said staff is going to identify students who should be distinguished and meet with them

and set expectations and hold them accountable.

Wilson wants to continue working on growth by monitoring individual student growth on MAP and identify students not showing adequate growth, then develop a plan for those students.

The school also wants to improve at the middle grade level, where they lack 2.6 point to be proficient. Wilson stated the administration has spent a lot of energy at the primary level the last few years, and they need to balance the time and focus on the middle grades as well.

Frakes School Center principal Bill Gibson stated Frakes ranked first in the district with a combined overall score of 61.5. At the elementary level, the school received 100 percent proficient/distinguished in social studies. The school received 94 percent proficient/distinguished in science at the elementary level.

In the middle grade level, the school received 100 percent proficient/distinguished in both social studies and science. The seventh grade received 70 percent proficient/distinguished in reading.

Some of the concerns for Frakes revolve around a high percentage of novice and apprentice students in math at the elementary and middle grades. Gibson also stated their is a high percentage of novice and apprentice in elementary reading.

There were no students that scored proficient in writing at the elementary and middle grades, and 60 percent of the students scored novice in writing mechanics.

Gibson plans to improve in math by implementing Corrective Math this year. He also stated he and a first grade teacher attended a Singapore math work shop recently and plan to integrate those strategies with the current math system.

Frakes will continue the interventions they
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currently have in place, including reading mastery and reading recovery.

Lisa Smith, principal at Page School Center, reported her school took a hit in middle grade math. She said some of the problem could have resulted from a teacher change in the middle of the year.

She stated the school's main success came in the form of middle level writing. The school had 65 percent of the students score proficient/distinguished. She also stated the elementary and middle school science and social studies had success.

There has been an upgrade in a reading program at the primary level. The upgraded program makes reading more interactive and may be able to take care of some issues with reading.

The school has also implemented calendar math through the sixth grade. The school also has Corrective Math. Smith stated the school uses para-educators on a daily basis.

Right Fork Elementary Principal Pam Collett announced the school ranked in the 81st percentile in the middle grades. Collett said the school was above the district and state average in reading, writing and language.

She also reported the school was above the district and state average in achievement and gap. The middle grade level was also above the district and state average in growth.

Right Fork fell behind in elementary growth. The elementary ranked in the 14th percentile in growth. Collett also stated the percentage of elementary and middle grade students in social studies was horrible.

Some things Collett plans to do to help the problems include Corrective Reading, Response to Intervention (RTI), Prep for Math, and many other programs.

When it comes to college and career readiness, 70 percent of students are at

benchmark. In the 2011-2012 school year, 45 percent of the students were at benchmark.

Yellow Creek School Center principal Jerry Lawson said the school scored proficient with a 72 percent ranking. They also ranked first in the district in achievement and gap.

There was a significant amount of middle grade students who scored proficient/distinguished. There were 61 percent of students who scored proficient in science, 65 percent in writing, 78 percent in social studies and 57 percent in reading.

The sixth grade reading had a growth of 44 percent, while math had 62 percent growth and 8th grade reading had 55.3 percent growth.

At the elementary level, 50 percent of the students scored proficient in third grade reading, 70 percent in fourth grade science and 61 percent in fifth grade social studies.

The main areas for concerns for the school are in math. Lawson stated math is the greatest need across the board. Fifty percent of students scored apprentice in math.

He also stated several students scored novice in elementary reading.

Lawson plans to use all the data to place students in RTI groups. He also wants to continue using Corrective Math and Corrective Reading. There will also be a focus on special needs children.

The school will continue working on time assessments to mirror the K-PREP.

After school tutoring is also available, he said.

Kevin Wilder from Lone Jack School Center was not present at the meeting, but plans to address the board during its next meeting.

Anthony Cloud is a staff writer for the Middlesboro Daily News. He can be contacted via email at acloud@heartlandpublications.com or by phone at 606-248-1010, ext. 208.

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Bell principals tell school board about test scores

By Anthony Cloud, Staff Writer

The Middlesboro Daily News

Nov. 20, 2012

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Principals from Bell County schools attended the Bell County Board of Education meeting on Monday to address the K-PREP scores recently received. Each principal commented on the good and the bad from the test results, as well as addressing how they plan to improve as time goes on.

There are several differences between the new K-PREP test and the KCCT exam of the past. K-PREP is based on a 100 point scale and is a comparison exam — comparing schools and students.

The exam also compares schools in areas such as achievement, growth, gap and college and career. All K-Prep scores are counted the same.

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Free and reduced students scored 10 points above the state average in English, he noted.

One main area for concern in English was the amount of novice students, which is on the lower end of the performance scale for the K-PREP test.

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school has implemented a new math program — Math Transformation — and have started incorporating the ALEKS program with targeted group, which Gambrel said he expects to boost math scores.

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Pineville board hears reports on K-PREP results

By Anthony Cloud, Staff Writer
The Middlesboro Daily News
Nov. 22, 2012
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The dreaded K-PREP scores — causing headaches for many schools and districts across Kentucky — were discussed during the Pineville School Board meeting this week. As with many other schools, board members and faculty were not pleased with the results.

Supervisor Paula Goodin reported the overall score for the elementary grades was 46.7, with the goal for the next assessment in May being 62.5.

For the middles grade levels, the overall score was 54, she said, adding the new goal for the next testing window is 58.7.

And, according to Goodin, the high school's overall score was 49.7, with the goal for May being set at 58.4.

As a whole, the Pineville district scored a 50.1. The goal for the district in the spring assessment is 58.4.

K-PREP is broken down into five different areas — achievement, gap, growth, college and career readiness and graduation rate.

The achievement portion of the exam is based on how well an individual scores on the exam. Growth is based on how students improve each year. Gap scores reflect on how well minority groups score on the test.

College and career readiness is affected by the EXPLORE, ACT and other assessments.

The graduate rate is based on the number of students that enroll as freshmen in comparison to the number of students who graduate four years later.

Though some test scores were lower than anticipated, there were many areas where the school scored above the state average. These included the middle and high school grade levels.

In reading, the middle grades scored a 60.5, beating the state average by 1.5 points. The middle grades also scored above the state average in science, writing, language mechanics and social studies. These areas received a perfect score.

The high school scored above the state average in science with a 55.6. The state average was 52.8.

Goodin stated she believes the next scores will show improvement.

"Our children are learning everyday," said Goodin.

Following the presentation of the K-PREP scores, the focus shifted to the EXPLORE and PLAN assessments, which were taken in September. The EXPLORE exam is the eighth grade predictor for how students will score as juniors on the ACT exam which is crucial for college admission. The PLAN exam predicts how sophomores are progressing and will score on the ACT.

With the EXPLORE exam, Goodin said there was a slight drop in English and reading. She then stated there was a growth in math and science. Overall, the district dropped a tenth of a point.

The school is accountable for the
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percentage of students who meet the benchmark in three subjects — English, reading and math.

In English, 76.7 percent of the students met the benchmark. Results for reading show 40 percent of students met the benchmark, while in math only 26.7 percent of the children met benchmark.

Scores increased in each aspect of the PLAN exam for sophomores.

In English, the score increased for 14.8 to 15.8. The math scores increased from 15.6 to 15.8. The reading score increased from 14.7 to 16.9. Science scores increased from 16.3 to 17.5.

The overall score for the district in the PLAN exam increased from 15.7 to 16.7.

"Anytime you move up a point on any type of ACT exam you are doing well," said Goodin.

When it came to students performing at benchmark level, 60 percent of the students met the English benchmark. In reading, 47.5 percent were reading on benchmark level while only 15 percent were at the science benchmark. Only 7.5 percent of students performed at benchmark in math.

Both Pineville High School principal William Keyes and Pineville Elementary principal Cynthia Smith said they have and continue to implement programs and activities to increase scores.

Keyes said the high school is coming up with a mentoring program that involves school faculty helping children improve on test scores. Keyes said there have been 29 students identified for the program. Each

teacher and staff member will have a minimum of one student to mentor.

Keyes stated that everyone should be available for after-school tutoring sessions and teach reading and writing across the curriculum. In addition, Keyes stated he plans to increase expectations for students and have teachers teaching from bell to bell.

He also hopes to increase parent contact.

Smith also showed an interest in starting a mentoring program for students who need improvement, as well as having teachers create a personal growth plan for themselves.

Teachers are also expected to began creating success plans for all students who did not score in the proficient to distinguished range on the K-PREP.

Smith said there are plans to enhance the after-school program and purchase new testing material that will model the new standards established by the state.

Anthony Cloud is a staff writer for the Middlesboro Daily News. He can be contacted via email at accloud@heartlandpublications.com or by phone at 606-248-1010, ext. 208.

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Hanson scores in 94th percentile in test

Elementary
school earns
top designation

BY ERIN SCHMITT
MESSENGER STAFF WRITER
ESCHMITT@THE-MESSENGER.COM

HANSON — Administrators and staff at Hanson Elementary weren't sure what to expect from state test scores this year.

After all, the whole game had changed, as one teacher put it, since the state was now scoring all schools by a new accountability system.

So learning the results for the 2012 Kentucky Performance Rating for Education Progress exams came as a relief and a bit of a surprise to those at the school.

Hanson Elementary was deemed a distinguished school, reserved for schools in the state scoring in the 90th percentile or above.

Scoring in the 94th percentile of all elementaries in Kentucky, Hanson was also named to the highest performing school category.

Principal Jon Wells credits the teachers, students and parents for Hanson's success.

He stressed, however, that each school in the district has equally hard-working students, teachers and parent support.

Hanson has a history of excelling on state testing. The school has been considered a pacemaker by the state, consistently landing in the top 10 percent, since 2004.

Former Principal DeDe Ashby, now the principal at Madisonville-North Hopkins High School, was instrumental in putting

Hanson on the right path, said Wells.

"She was very persistent in making sure that Hanson scored well and did a really good job of setting that tone here," Wells said.

While it's nice to have consistently high test scores, it can also be a lot of pressure to continue, he said. Learning the school performed well was a relief to the staff.

Not knowing what to expect from the new accountability system had been stressful, said fourth grade teacher Jennifer Gobin.

"We just kind of felt like we were flying blind a lot of the time because there was so many unanswered questions," she said.

The teachers spent the summer poring over common core standards and looking at its existing programs, said Dawn Moore, a fourth-grade teacher. Moore did scrimmage testing in her class and focused on targeting areas that would be tested.

"We did a lot of hands on activities in science, so that they would really understand the information," she said.

Gobin said she incorporated a lot of vocabulary into her instruction. Hanson teachers emphasized using Greek and Latin root words to familiarize students.

Wells said he was proudest of the students' math scores. Standards

for the subject changed last year and became more challenging. The principal said it took a lot of work on behalf of the teachers to fill in gaps in curriculum.

"We had holes because the kids were not coming from third grade not knowing what was supposed to be built on from previous years," said Moore. "It wasn't their fault that third grade didn't do it, it was new material. So we were building a whole new bridge."

Hanson was the only school in Hopkins County to use the math program Saxon last year, so there were concerns it was obsolete, Wells said. The teachers supplemented Saxon with other materials to fill gaps.

"As I tell our teachers, it's not the program that teaches the kids, it's the teacher," he said. "People are more important than programs. If you've got good people, then they are going to be able to do good things."

The students are also good at taking ownership in their education and striving to perform well, Gobin said.

"We have a really good parent support at home as well and the parents push them to do their best and work hard," she said.

The staff members said they feel more confident going into this year's testing, since they know what to expect.

There were some shortfalls in the school's gap group, Wells said, so he would like to achieve

higher scores in that category.

A gap group is how different student groups, including free/reduced lunch, special education and ethnic minorities, perform in content areas.

As for closing out last year's success with a bang, Wells said the school plans to do what it normally does for high performing students — hold a pep rally and inviting back former students now in sixth grade at James Madison Middle School.

Names of students who performed well will be posted on a brag board in the hall and kids who scored proficient or distinguished will be given medals.

The Kentucky Standard

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Bardstown Schools focus on positives

District on borderline of becoming proficient

By Jennifer Corbett

Saturday, November 24, 2012 at 11:06 am

Given some time, Bardstown school officials believe most students will become proficient, according to state testing scores, because most of them are already on the cusp of achieving it.

Results from the Kentucky Performance Rating for Education Progress (KPREP) test indicated some students scored on the higher end of the novice and apprentice category, said Cara Blackmon, director of instruction and assessment for the Bardstown Independent Board of Education, at Tuesday's board meeting.

Bardstown Elementary Principal Paul Bowling said the KPREP results indicate there is "opportunity for growth."

"Many of our kids are on the cusp of being on the next performance level," he said at Tuesday's board meeting. "We know exactly what that student scored. We have challenges ahead. But we felt like the things we are doing and implementing new this year will help us get there."

Under KPREP, schools are graded on achievement, growth, gap, college/career readiness and graduation rate.

Overall, in the specific categories by which they are evaluated, individual schools were slightly above or slightly below state averages. As a district, Bardstown was ranked in the 29th percentile statewide.

Bardstown Elementary School scored an 18.6 in achievement, 9.9 in gap and 22.8 in growth, which puts its overall score at 51.3. That score ranked it in the 26th percentile statewide.

According to Blackmon, 33 percent of students who scored apprentice were high apprentice and 93 percent of students who scored novice were on the cusp of being apprentice.

Bardstown Middle School scored a 17 in achievement, 9.3 in gap, 15.6 in growth and 5.6 in college/career readiness, which puts its overall score at 47.5. That score ranked it in the 23rd percentile statewide.

Similar to the elementary school, 33 percent of middle school students who scored apprentice were high apprentice and 92 percent of students who scored novice were high novice, Blackmon said.

Bardstown High School scored a 7.2 in gap. The school scored an 11.7 in growth, a 12.3 in achievement, 8.5 in college/career readiness and 16.3 graduation rate, which put its overall score at 56. That score ranked it in the 58th percentile statewide.

Any school placing below the 70th percentile statewide was classified as "needing improvement," the lowest category. Distinguished schools were those that placed in the 90th percentile, and proficient schools were 70th-89th percentile.

KPREP gives a half point for students who score apprentice and one point for students who score distinguished or proficient in achievement and gap. No points are given for students who score novice. If a school has more distinguished students than novice, they receive bonus points. Growth is graded on how well students improved from the 2010-2011 CATS test to the KPREP.

Blackmon said with the implementation of Senate Bill 1, they've had to change the culture of public education and "change the way students learn."

That's why at first glance the numbers may seem low, but since so many students are on the verge of becoming proficient, the district expects the numbers to increase next year.

"Teachers have to change the way they teach and that takes time," she said.

Some of the systems in place to improve the scores include small-group instruction, interim assessment system and writing across curriculum — where teachers have made a shift in their instruction to coincide with the on-demand writing portion of KPREP — and professional learning communities.

In terms of learning communities, Bowling said his teachers are focusing on: Are the students learning the material? How do we know if they're learning? What do we do if they're not learning? What do we do if they already know the material?

"By focusing on those four things, teachers still have the freedom to teach how they want," he said, but the product "the students are going to get is the same."

In other news:

- The board has collected 81 percent of its tax bills, which includes the 2 percent discount some have opted to receive.
- The district's textbook committee met to discuss a possible switch to electronic schoolbooks.

According to Superintendent Brent Holsclaw, the move would mean the district would have to increase its wireless infrastructure. He said they're currently exploring what would be the most viable option and what technology would have the most longevity.

- Workers have completed resurfacing the elementary's and middle school's roof.

JENNIFER CORBETT can be contacted at jcorbett@kystandard.com